

Time After Time

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Time After Time

by [Languidly](#)

Summary

Three lifetimes where love was not enough - and then one lifetime when it was.

First Time

Chapter Notes

So, I wasn't quite sure how to tag this. The various incarnations of Megatron and Rodimus are technically original characters, though it's perhaps fairly apparent who they become. Incarnations of other characters show up throughout as well. I'm also uncertain as to whether this counts as an AU, since it's written as one continuum before the timeline joins up with the IDW universe.

Anyway, at least one of the earlier 'lifetimes' was an idea I've had for a MegaRod AU for awhile, now repurposed with much liberty. It's the first time I've written something as freeform as this, so I hope you enjoy it! As always, happy to answer any questions about my fics here or on Twitter @languidly_

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“What are you looking at?” the Senior Priest’s voice is sharp and reproving.

Fiberfoil ducks his helm immediately, abashed. “Nothing,” he mumbles. Ahead of them, a service has just ended; the large glass doors to the Chamber have opened and other priests and several lords are streaming out. In the midst of them, sparkling as brightly and brilliantly as a jewel, is Aerolin Prime.

The *Prime!* Fiberfoil’s spark is in his throat. He has never seen Aerolin from so close, and not from anything outside of a holovid before now, though he has been working in the Temple of Primus for almost a kilocycle. Today is the first time he’s been lifted from the lowest duties of keeping the perimeters of the temple spick and span, the first time he’s been placed in the official long regalia of the temple servants.

“Keep your optics down,” the Senior Priest hisses as they near the crowd. “When we enter the Chamber, stay to the side, make sure you don’t stand within two mechanometers of anyone, and start cleaning up as quietly as you can. Do you remember what you have to do?”

“Collect the sacramental fuel cubes, polish the benches and sweep the floor,” Fiberfoil recites as he struggles to keep his frame appropriately subdued. He’s too excited, and still almost disbelieving of his good luck that he finally gets to see some of what goes on within the temple - he’s determined not to muck it up.

“Good. I will rejoin the other senior priests in the garden for the Prime’s last blessings. Make sure you’re done within five breems. I will meet you by the door to take you to the wash areas, where you’ll learn how to clean the cubes and replace them properly.”

He bobs his helm in obedience, and then they’re at the doors.

The Senior Priest leaves him with a smooth about-turn. Fiberfoil steps quickly over the threshold, plucking the tray for the cubes from his subspace. From the garden, he can hear Aerolin’s lilting laughter, warm and welcoming. He has just decided to give in to the urge to sneak back to the door and peek out when he crashes, *hard*, into something.

The tray clatters to the ground. Fiberfoil is about to fall onto his own aft as well when a strong servo wraps around his wrist, steadying him. He stifles the urge to groan at the jolt, at the unholy racket the tray is making, and he prays fervently that the sound is not audible from the garden before his processor catches up with him and he jerks his helm back to his rescuer.

He looks up. And up. His throat seizes in panic.

The mech is *enormous*. Towering over him, at least twice Fiberfoil's own height, the silver-gray lethally-barbed helm is all but brushing the top of the beautifully stained crystal ceiling. Darkly gleaming red optics stare down at him over thin lips set in a stern line, and from behind a massive chassis comes the deep, ominous rumble of an unnaturally-powerful engine.

It takes a moment longer for Fiberfoil to notice the thick, decorative gold lines painted up the mech's colossal arms, and the large braided coil of metal magnetized to one heavily-armored shoulder. His processor almost cuts out then, because now there's absolutely no doubt.

Lord High Protector Magnalock.

On his first day doing more than menial labor, within his first *astrominute* in the Chamber, he's managed to fail the keep-two-mechanometers-away rule and collide into the most powerful mech on Cybertron. If he isn't put away or offlined at once, he is probably going to be left cleaning the perimeter of the temple for the rest of his days.

"Are you alright?" Magnalock enquires. His voice is gravelly low but even with how soft it is, Fiberfoil can feel the barely-leashed force thrumming behind it. His wrist is released. Fiberfoil realizes belatedly and distractedly that nothing has been crushed, for all that the servo is big enough to wrap around his entire helm. With a squeak, hydraulics frozen between the urge to flee or give out, he manages to nod frantically, backing away.

Magnalock watches him as he plasters himself to the wall, edging further and further. The line of the Lord High Protector's mouth relaxes a fraction, quirking up. With a smooth bend of one knee, Magnalock picks up the forgotten tray, then holds it out without a word.

Fiberfoil looks at it, then back up. Magnalock is...not angry?

He reaches out cautiously with his field before he can think about the wisdom of the action, and almost falls over again at the sheer breadth and overwhelming weight of the other's field. For a long nanoklik, his fuel pump clenches a little- but then he notices the light pulse of amusement, an almost-imperceptible strobe through the blanketing heaviness.

Offense streaks in before Fiberfoil can quite manage to wrestle it down. He's frightened, for good reason, but he *hates* being laughed at, and it- it was an honest mistake, surely nothing to be mocked for. Impulsively, he pushes himself off the wall and darts forward, ready to snatch the tray back.

He's forgotten the long mesh regalia draped across his body and promptly trips on it, sending him flying face-first towards the floor. Before he can make contact with it though, Magnalock's grip is on his shoulder and this time, the Lord High Protector doesn't even try to stifle a short bark of laughter.

Fiberfoil looks up and his vents catch in his intake.

Magnalock is so *close*. With the larger mech having bent down to pick up the tray, they're much more of a height now. Their nasal ridges are almost brushing, and the heat emanating from the

Lord High Protector is incredible, an almost visible haze in the closed air between their frames. Fiberfoil's spark stutters, giving an odd pulse. He licks his lips instinctively, and he sees as Magnalock's optics drop to them.

"Magnalock?"

The Lord High Protector stiffens, but only for a moment. Then he's releasing his grip on Fiberfoil's shoulder, pushing the tray towards Fiberfoil's frame and smoothly rising at the same time before turning to face the speaker at the entryway. "Yes, my Prime?"

"Is anything the matter?"

Fiberfoil's attention is diverted from his own mortification by the gentle glow that fills the room as the Prime steps forward, canting his tall, elegant helm inquisitively. Even from behind Magnalock, Fiberfoil can feel the inexorable pull of another vast EM field. But where Magnalock's is thick and heavy enough to drown in, the Prime's is light, open and soft.

"Nothing at all," comes the deep reply, and then Magnalock is moving away, heading towards the exit. Both Prime and Lord High Protector incline their helms to each other, and then Aerolin mutters something under his breath. The Lord High Protector snorts once. Without a backward glance, they leave, and Fiberfoil finally allows himself to collapse to the ground, tray pressed against his chassis, fingers numb.

Practicing for the ceremonial sword dances is always punishingly exhausting. Fiberfoil has always been rather flexible, and he enjoys pushing his frame into the intricate moves that let the elaborate costume swirl around him, but at the same time, keeping exactly in time with five other frames is *hard work*.

Thankfully, Silverhull has been a patient and generous friend and teacher. The other racing frame entered the temple four kilocycles before Fiberfoil and worked his way up to become a junior priest, but he is one of the few not to throw his rank around, and he doesn't seem to look down on those in the bottom tier like Fiberfoil either. For all that Silverhull is older, they also enjoy the same whispered jokes on the more stately and serious members of the temple's servants. Silverhull is wondrous with the sword dance, as quick as lightning, graceful while still strong - Fiberfoil privately thinks that Silverhull is good enough to lead the ceremonies, but of course the older and more experienced dancers stay at the front.

Nevertheless, Silverhull is considered skilled enough to be put to work teaching Fiberfoil. Their friendship has grown through the long cycles of practice in preparation for the festival.

It's late by the time they are dismissed. Fiberfoil thinks longingly of the heated oil pools, but per the schedule, it's reserved for the junior priests for two joors. He suddenly remembers that he *has* seen an unheated pool on the farthest side of the garden though - he'd noticed it from the outside before when he'd been cleaning the perimeter. It's presumably out-of-use for being outdoors, and it's tucked safely behind a hedge of crystal flowers. Perhaps it's worth the slight chill to have his cables and struts soaking right away before he has to rejoin the rest of his cohort for recharge?

He bids Silverhull a quick goodbye, then races away. The fastest route to the unheated pool is past the Chamber. It's an area which Fiberfoil has been steadfastly avoiding ever since the incident with the Lord High Protector. Magnalock must never have said anything about Fiberfoil's mistakes though, because other than a critical examination of the floor and an order to repolish one bench, the Senior Priest had not said anything. Fiberfoil doesn't know whether to be grateful or

suspicious. He's also still somewhat embarrassed and, if he's honest with himself, a little irritated that the Lord High Protector had been laughing at him.

It has absolutely nothing to do with the heat that collects in his circuitry when he thinks of that intense red gaze, the unwavering strength of the hands that held him, or the sharp lines of those fierce and weathered faceplates.

Thankfully, with the late hour, the area seems deserted. Fiberfoil takes a cautious look around before hightailing it past the Chambers, remembering just in time not to rev his engine loud enough to attract any attention. Slipping through the garden, keeping his frame low to the ground, he moves in the general direction he thinks the pool is in before finally stumbling upon it.

It's with a rush of triumph and glee that he slips the costume off, letting the heavy woven mesh fall in a rustling tangle. He tests the temperature of the oil with a finger and grimaces - it's a bit colder than he would prefer, but a soak is still preferable to no soak. Flaring his plating once and then pulling it tight against him, he slides into the pool, stretching out and glancing up towards the stars.

It's easy to forget the cold once he acclimatizes. The view of the twinkling, faraway lights is beautiful, and the utter silence around him is peaceful in a way he hasn't really appreciated since he started his duties here. He lets his frame and his processor float away, losing himself in a bubble of tranquility.

After a time, his chronometer finally pings. He still needs time to clean up, wash the costume with solvent, and then head back towards the lower quarters. With a reluctant vent, he straightens, pedes sinking to touch the bottom of the pool before he turns to reach for a handhold to pull himself out.

Across the expanse of the secluded area, his optics lift and meet a flickering red gaze. The shock freezes his entire frame.

The Lord High Protector unfolds from the corner where he has been sitting, cloaked in the darkest shadows of the garden. A datapad is held loosely in one massive servo, but its screen is dimmed as though it hasn't been read in a while. There is no way that Magnalock could have entered this alcove without Fiberfoil noticing, surely...which means that the Lord High Protector has been sitting there *all this time*.

He's still frozen when Magnalock draws closer, and before he can push himself back to flee, one large servo wraps around his outstretched arm. He is lifted bodily from the pool with no apparent effort, and now the terror is taking over in uncontrollable tremors.

It's terror and...and...

The remnants of the oil are spilling down his frame, rolling in thick streams across his suddenly flushed panels, and Fiberfoil thinks he should say something, *anything* - croak out an excuse, squeak an apology, snipe out a question about being watched - but his focus is completely taken up by the roiling desire in Magnalock's optics and the scorching heat of the hands cupping him under his aft, holding him securely against that massive chassis. His own hands come up to land shakily on the thick shoulders, though whether his fingers are gripping tight or pushing away, he can't tell.

"Do you want me?" Magnalock murmurs. That deep, rough voice is everything that Fiberfoil remembers. It lights an electric charge deep inside, seems to echo through every component within. The very resonance feels like it's tugging at his spark, pulsing a rapid beat. His fingers curl and he gasps once helplessly. Everything around them seems to disappear.

It's forbidden. Fiberfoil *knows* this. He's a *servant of the temple*. His position now is the highest he

will ever rise to, the highest that he's even dared to aspire to, and the mech in front of him is so, so far above that. Magnalock is beyond blame, beyond magnificent, chosen by Primus himself to wield a blade in protection of all Cybertron. There is nothing for Fiberfoil in such an entanglement, nothing but the ash of his function and the doom of a future bleak with hopeless yearning.

"Yes," he breathes. "Yes."

Magnalock crushes their lips together.

Arousal pours like hot oil through every line, and Fiberfoil feels like he's drowning. He's scrabbling at Magnalock's armor and Magnalock is sinking down to the ground, pulling Fiberfoil astride him. At some point, Fiberfoil's panels have opened; he's spread wide across that massive lap and he has never felt so hot, so wet, so *ready*. Magnalock growls against his mouth, reaching between them to brush the back of one battle-scarred servo against the delicate plates of Fiberfoil's spike. Fiberfoil hears himself whimpering, rocking against the touch, inarticulately moaning when a large digit strokes further down. It sinks into the flushed, sensitive opening of his valve, and Fiberfoil jerks and muffles a gasp.

He's distantly aware of the Lord High Protector's thick, ridged spike pressurizing between them. It scorches a line against his plating, down the very center of his frame as he writhes on the fingers exploring and stretching him. But he can't seem to move his lips away from Magnalock's long enough to look. There's something there, something at the very corners of his processor spinning wildly trying to make sense of all of this, but he feels so utterly exhilarated that he can't pull himself away to think.

When Magnalock lines himself up, lifts Fiberfoil effortlessly and slides inside in one gloriously slow, slick movement, it feels so full - so *right*. Fiberfoil hears the shaky groan as it leaves his vocalizer and is swallowed up into Magnalock's mouth, still slanted over his own. He's clutching the back of Magnalock's helm and the demands of his frame have taken over. He's incoherent, bucking needily back and forth, desperate for release. For *more*.

His chestplates are transforming aside before he knows that he's doing it, and it's not until his sparklight is casting a dully luminous glow on them both that Fiberfoil realizes that this is definitely taking it too far. Except- except Magnalock makes a harsh, hungry noise, sliding one servo into Fiberfoil's open chest. Knowing what that servo is capable of - the most violent brutality, unquestionable and all-encompassing power - and knowing that it could crush his spark chamber, offlining him instantly- As it strokes tantalizingly and without hesitation across the fragile crystal, it's so much, too much.

Fiberfoil overloads with a scream. He's so dazed that he only just notices Magnalock following him over with a tortured groan, hiling deep and venting hard, the barest tremble dancing across the thick armored plates.

They slump against each other, and Fiberfoil slowly becomes aware of the full-throttle of their cooling fans, whirring too loud in the silence.

Then the horror roars into sudden wakefulness in his processor. What has he done?

He slams his chestplates shut and flails, pushing weakly against Magnalock's chest and trying to throw himself to the side. It works, but badly - he falls out of the Lord High Protector's lap and lands with limbs askew on the ground. Magnalock's optics glitter at him, gaze trailing hotly down, lingering on his chest before moving to between his legs where his valve is still gaping open, leaking a copious amount of lubricant and transfluid.

“We can’t- we shouldn’t have- ” he can hear the words spilling out in a panicked babble. The Lord High Protector may be allowed to have his dalliances, but *Fiberfoil* is certainly not allowed that same free rein. He’s destroyed any sense of propriety, his own boundaries for his lot in life, and if anyone ever finds out, he’ll be condemned and thrown out.

Magnalock is watching him silently, and Fiberfoil spares half a nanoklik to wonder at the considering flick in those red optics as he scrabbles for his costume. His chronometer pings at the same time, the final hammer-strike on his burgeoning agitation.

“I have to go,” he blurts, and then he turns and flees.

Fiberfoil has managed to push the encounter with the Lord High Protector out of his processor with sheer stubborn determination. He’s near managed to convince himself that it was a dream, that the growing longing in his chest is nothing but a total fantasy.

He throws himself into cleaning, into the practices, into memorizing the scriptures that he’s always been bad at. He manages to avoid the Chamber by volunteering for tasks only in the servants’ quarters and leaving the rest for his batch-mates, most of whom prefer to work in the sculptured gardens where they might catch a glimpse of the Prime and other honored guests.

But then the day of the ceremonies dawn, and Fiberfoil realizes with a jolt of despair that he won’t be able to avoid it any longer.

“What’s troubling you?” Silverhull asks conversationally as he carefully brushes the spray-paint over Fiberfoil’s plating. The dancers all require holy glyphs to be drawn over their armor for the celebratory dance and at any other time, Fiberfoil would have been delighted - the elaborate swirls of midnight blue and shimmering violet stand out beautifully against his own red and yellow colors. But the idea of seeing the Lord High Protector again, even if only from a distance...

What is he thinking, anyway? That he might mean more than a casual affair? It’s more likely that Magnalock has already forgotten how he looks, more likely that what they did is already buried beneath several nights of other willing frames and interfacing.

He takes a deep invent. “I’m just- anxious for the performance,” he says instead, and it’s not a lie. This is the first time that he will be dancing with the rest. He’s been positioned at the very back, in the corner, where he won’t be really visible. The choreography is such that he’ll be hidden by the lead dancers most of the time, but he does need to make sure his footwork is right in order to create the complex overall patterns and poses of the dance.

Silverhull pulses reassurance in his field. “You’re going to do great, ‘Foil. Just relax and do as we’ve practised. I’ll be right there with you.”

Fiberfoil leans against his friend gratefully. “That’s right,” he murmurs. “Thanks.”

The nerves settle, oddly enough, right as the dance starts. The stage has been set right in the center of the garden, and it’s far enough from all those sitting in the Chamber that he can’t actually see anyone beneath the decorative veil that has been fastened across his helm as part of the costume. He follows Silverhull’s cues and steps confidently into the moves that he’s practised over and over and over again. The even, harmonious fields of the other dancers sweep him into a languid sense of calmness.

It’s over before he knows it, and they bow low to the ground as they end. When they rise,

Silverhull shoots him a pleased, proud grin, and Fiberfoil finds himself returning it, beaming hard enough to burst. They file out of the garden in single formation, Fiberfoil bringing up the rear.

Just before they turn into the servants' quarters, a tall, slim guard steps into their path. There's a short, quiet exchange with the lead dancer before the guard moves back, allowing them to pass. Fiberfoil thinks nothing of it until Silverhull, walking just ahead of him, crosses the threshold and the guard holds out a hand.

"Sixth-ranked, Fiberfoil: to follow me."

Fiberfoil jerks his helm up in surprise, and just before Silverhull disappears behind the wall, he sees his friend shoot him a concerned look.

"What- what is this about?" he asks, trying to quench the bloom of worry in his core. Has he messed up after all? Is he to be taken to see the Head Priest, to be chastised for some misstep on such an important ceremony?

"Fiberfoil: to follow," the guard repeats, dropping his hand and walking away.

It's not like he can do anything else. Pedes suddenly heavy, Fiberfoil turns and pads behind the guard. The only sound between them is the soft jingle of his ceremonial wear.

He's led towards the opposite direction. They move without speaking behind the Chamber where the low sounds of conversation still linger, and then veer and head down a pathway he has never been before. They pass small, warm-lit rooms, another garden, several large columns, and then abruptly enter a cavernous hallway.

The guard stops in front of a huge door that reaches almost to the ceiling, then bows at apparently nothing. The door slides open, revealing a dimly-lit passage.

"Fiberfoil: to enter."

"Wha- " he begins, even more anxious now, but the guard is already leaving without a backward glance.

There's nothing for it. He steels himself, willing his frame to take one step forward, then two. The trepidation is cresting, alone in this unfamiliar place, but he pulls his shoulders back and forges forward until he emerges from the passage into a vast room.

"There you are."

He stops dead in his tracks, his spark feeling like it's about to spin right out of his chest. Slowly, slowly, he turns towards the voice.

The Lord High Protector is reclining against the head of an enormous berth, one arm draped casually on a raised knee. Once again, those dark red optics ensnare Fiberfoil, drawing him in as though magnetized. Without realizing it, he's already moving there, one hand coming up hesitantly to touch the edge of the berth.

Magnalock is staring at him, expressionless.

"Who is he?"

The question is so incongruous, Fiberfoil wonders if his processor has already malfunctioned.

"Who?"

“The other dancer. The one you smiled at when the performance was over. Who is he?”

The easy question doesn't quite cover the hint of a threat, lurking barely beneath the surface. He casts his memory frantically back, wondering what on Cybertron the Lord High Protector is asking about. And then it hits. For one blinding moment, Fiberfoil worries that he has somehow gotten his best friend into trouble. “Silverhull? He's my teacher, my mentor.”

“Is that all?”

He's grasping at slivers as to how Silverhull fits into any of this. “Yes?”

Magnalock raises one optic ridge slightly. “Are you asking me if that's all he is to you?”

Fiberfoil blinks. “No. No, of course not. That's, uh. Yes. That's all he is to me. Why?”

The Lord High Protector...*relaxes*, if that's what Fiberfoil can assume by the uncurling of the large fist resting on the side of the berth. Without warning, that immense, devastating EM field is furling open, blanketing him in its heavy warmth and a subtle, heady promise of pleasure. Magnalock beckons with one finger and Fiberfoil finds himself climbing up onto the berth before he can question it. He shuffles forward on his knees until he's sitting astride one heavily-armored thigh, the plating feeling dangerously heated against his own rapidly-warming panel.

His spark spins dizzily. Why is he doing this again?

A large arm curves around his waist, dragging him closer until their arrays are flush. The veil across his helm is lifted carefully, the fragile mesh pulled back and tucked behind his finials. Magnalock's thumb strokes his cheek, his lip, and then the touch is replaced by the tip of a hot, questing glossa.

“Do you still want me?” Magnalock murmurs.

Primus help him. He can't remember why he shouldn't.

“Yes,” the word spills from him, urgent and craving. “Yes.”

It's the middle of the night when the alarm blares throughout the temple.

Fiberfoil fights his way out of the tangle of blankets. His batch-mates are in similar states of disarray around him, scrambling to get up and answer the summons. There's a strange pounding in his spark, a restless and frightened hollowing, and he barely manages to dismiss it long enough to follow the tide of the other servants flowing to the steps of the Chamber where the Head Priest stands solemn and straight-backed. Silverhull steps into line beside him, catching his hand with almost painful force.

There's never been a gathering like this, which can only mean...

“Aerolin Prime is dead,” the Head Priest announces gravely. “Fallen in battle to the rebel forces sent by the Quintessons. The Matrix has been retrieved at great cost, and will be delivered here by the Lord High Protector's guards at the earliest possible time. We must be ready to receive it, and to prepare the ceremony for the next selection. The Senior Priests will go among you and divide the necessary duties, and- ”

The rest of the instructions drown in the static filling Fiberfoil's audials. He swings to face

Silverhull, and though he already knows the answer, he chokes the question out anyway. “The Lord High Protector?”

Silverhull might have suspected, but has always been kind enough not to ask. Not to pry. His best friend looks at him and then pulls him close, hard enough to hurt.

“You know the Lord High Protector and the Prime were split-spark brothers, ‘Foil. If Aerolin Prime is gone, then Magnalock has passed as well.”

Light threatens to stream from his optics. His entire frame feels numb in Silverhull’s embrace. “That can’t be.”

But there’s no time for Silverhull to coddle him or to offer more comfort. His friend kisses him on the helm, dark blue optics full of pity, before moving to join the rest of the junior priests in the archive to update all the relevant scriptures. Fiberfoil knows he has to get to his batch-mates, because they’ve probably been assigned to clean again and he can’t just stand here, swaying in the sudden sensation that his fate has been ripped asunder.

A Senior Priest flanked by two of the temple guards surround him. He still can’t move.

“This is the one,” the Senior Priest says, nodding to the guards. “He must be disposed of before the selection. We cannot have any illicit connections to the previous Prime or Lord High Protector here when the new candidates arrive. Understood?”

They all but carry him away. And when at last they have escorted him far enough, and stripped off the insignias and glyphs of the temple, they chain him to an overhang hidden behind a twisted steel outcropping and leave him there to starve.

The grief takes him long before the energon dries in his lines.

Chapter End Notes

Fiberfoil - Rodimus

Magnalock - Megatron

Silverhull - Drift

Magnalock's guard - Soundwave

Second Time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's been stuck on this outpost for the last three vorns, and if Relatch doesn't get any instruction soon to return to Cybertron, he swears he's going to build his own damn ship and fly away. He's a mechanic, he knows what to do.

As one of the farther-flung bases for military units to stop by for rest or repairs, this little planetoid doesn't see much direct action. Relatch is both thankful and frustrated for it. It *would* be nice to have something more exciting than the occasional battered ship swinging down, but on the other hand, the ongoing war with the ring of organic-populated planets in the Sub-Noctium system is not really something he wants to dip his servos into either.

Sometimes, Relatch doesn't even know why they're fighting. Wasn't life supposed to be about finding things that one could enjoy? And maybe indulging in a little adventure from time to time?

A streaking burst lights up in the distant sky above. Ah.

No one has found a way yet, but Relatch is willing to bet that if meteor-surfing could be done, it would definitely count as one of those little adventures. Something fun that wouldn't kill anyone.

Perfect.

Then there's another burst of light, and this one seems much closer. Relatch squints at it, before his jaw drops.

The damaged vessel is coming in hot, three of its four engines trailing black smoke. From its trajectory, it's going to miss the dock completely. Relatch curses and starts running. He is sweeping an entire table's worth of emergency medical supplies into his subspace when he hears the distant crash. Fumbling, he sends an urgent ping to the medical bay before looking around quickly to see if there's anything else he might need.

Without waiting for an answering ping, he transforms and quickly drives out to the wreckage. The ship has split almost cleanly in half, and fire is already licking up one side of it. Hastily, he somersaults back into root mode as he nears and swings himself up into the flaming area that was formerly the bridge. There are two mechs there - or rather, what's left of them. The frames are already graying.

He leaps down to the ground and clambers up into the other half. There's another mech there, a large warframe, from the looks of it. The pede in view is not moving and there's a puddle of energon spreading beneath it. Relatch feels his spark sink as he scrambles closer.

A thin line of light flickers in the red visor as Relatch reaches out, and it galvanizes him into motion. He all but pours the equipment in his subspace out, grabbing for protoform patches and insulators for exposed wiring.

"Stay with me," he urges, splicing lines together as roughly as he can and clipping off the ones he can't. "The medic's almost here."

The visor brightens again splotchily before dimming.

It's less than a breem after that when Crimper shows up with a disgruntled hiss, hauling his heavy frame up onto the deck. "Seriously?" he grumbles, though the words hold no real spite. "You couldn't get him outside on the ground?"

Relatch mock-scowls back. "He's twice my size, Crimps. Even if I'd wanted to spare you the climb, I couldn't have done it on my own."

"Yea. You work on upgrading those hydraulics, kid." Crimper's specialized hands are already busy at work. The medic also had the foresight to bring a small tank of medical grade with a thick fueling line. He proceeds to solder the line with the edges of one of the larger leaks, and Relatch watches with fascination as the light slowly returns to the red visor. This time, it continues to brighten without fading.

"Designation?" Crimper grunts.

The heavy square helm turns infinitesimally towards the medic, though Relatch gets the oddest sensation that the gaze behind the visor is still fixed on him. "Mantelet."

"Well, Mantelet, you're not in a good way, but I think I can safely say you're not going to offline here. Can you get up?"

There's the rather noisy sound of heavy systems cycling back into readiness. Mantelet is built like an entire wall of armor, all dense blocky parts specialized for shielding and resistance. There's a huge drill mounted on his right arm that looks as though it could grind a tunnel large enough for Relatch to fit in. With external bits and pieces of all that machinery hanging loose, the sound of the large mech dragging himself upright is a downright grinding assault on the audials.

"Good," Crimper mutters, then looks down pointedly at the supplies Relatch scattered earlier on the deck in his hurry. Taking the hint, he kneels to gather them and scoop them up into his subspace again, watching as Crimper guides Mantelet down the more stable parts of the wreckage.

It's hardly the first mech that Relatch has saved from a close call, so he's hard-pressed to wonder why his spark is spinning faster.

Relatch is sitting at a low table looking out the port window when the sound of heavy steps makes him whirl around.

A small warmed cube of plain fuel is set down in front of him. Mantelet's expression is carefully neutral as Relatch grins in surprise and pleasure. "Hey! You look like you're doing much better!" He gestures for the warframe to take the seat opposite before he looks up to confirm that the cube was, indeed, meant for him. At a short nod of Mantelet's helm, he picks it up and takes a small sip, curling his pedes under him on the chair. "Thanks."

"You saved me," Mantelet says abruptly. "I should be the one thanking you."

He waves it off over another mouthful of fuel. "That's my job. I'm just glad you're okay." He peers at Mantelet as unobtrusively as he can, noting that everything appears to have been welded back into place - with how large the mech is, Relatch realizes belatedly that he really should have heard him coming from further away. Now fully repaired, Mantelet is clearly far more stealthy than he looks.

"Which battle were you in?" he asks conversationally, when Mantelet says nothing more. He notices as Mantelet's fists tighten in his lap, the thin mouth pinching grimly.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Alright. Well. What are your plans now? Are you going to hitch a ride back to Sub-Noctium with the next ship or are you going to try and make it back to Cybertron?”

There’s a subtle flinch when the Sub-Noctium system is mentioned. But the red visor turns back from the window to regard him. “I was wondering if I could stay here for a while.”

Relatch blinks. “Here? Out on this scrapheap with just me and old Crimps for company? Why would you want to do that?”

The heavy jaw clenches once, before it eases incrementally with a visible effort. “It’s quiet here. I- I don’t think I’d deal well with a lot of noise...and being around many other mechs right now.”

Relatch thinks of their fuel stores, of the odd jobs that require doing around the outpost. Neither are particularly suitable for upkeeping a warframe over a longer period of time.

“Okay, fine by me,” he says nonchalantly. “If Crimper agrees too. We could probably use your help moving some of those crash drums in the dock around.”

Mantelet stares hard at him, seemingly taken aback for all that he posed the request. “That’s it? You’ll let me stay, just like that?”

Relatch shrugs. There’s something strange but familiar knocking on the very edges of his conscious processing. It makes him wonder if he’s ever met Mantelet before this. “Ah. Yea. You don’t seem like a bad guy.”

Mantelet frowns. The incredulity is bleeding a little strongly in his field, but Relatch ignores it in favor of finishing up his cube.

“You don’t even know me,” Mantelet says at last. “You don’t know the things I’ve done.”

Relatch grins at him again, subspacing the empty cube to drop off at the pantry later. “Well, we can change that, can’t we? Tell me about yourself!”

Mantelet shoots him a look that’s supremely unimpressed, before it turns contemplative. It starts off haltingly, interspersed with several suspicious glances at Relatch as if to confirm that he’s seriously interested and listening. Relatch puts on his best encouraging expression and is honestly surprised when he *does* find it interesting. He didn’t think he’d have much in common with a warframe on active duty.

He finds out that Mantelet was a builder before being conscripted, and that his reframing had cost him every credit he’d ever saved. The drill on his right arm had been upgraded for his new function and permanently welded on despite his misgivings. He finds out that Mantelet only recently taught himself to read, and that he likes that certain glyphs rhyme. Mantelet hesitates before admitting that he signed up to fight as much for his fierce love of their home planet as for better fuel rations, and that seeing the organics - a whole new species so completely different from Cybertronians - in the flesh for the first time had, to put it mildly, freaked him the slag out.

In turn, Relatch finds himself sharing his own disquieting thoughts. How he doesn’t know how much of his life and function is going to be spent parked on this lonely planetoid. How he really wishes he could travel more in deep space just for the thrill of discovering new places. How he wonders if he’ll ever make something of himself - though he’s not sure if it’s that he really wants to, or if it’s just a distant envy of others who seem to be doing more with their lives. Relatch doesn’t have an inclination for reading himself, but there’s something relaxing about listening to

Mantelet softly recite simple builder songs.

They talk for *joors*. Relatch doesn't remember the last time he connected with someone so intimately and on so many levels despite their differences. He says as much, wonderingly.

The illumination on Mantelet's visor ripples a little at Relatch's honest admission. But over the span of their long conversation, the guarded field has eased enough that Relatch can feel the tentative warmth in it now.

"I have not- " the words are awkward, but Mantelet's gaze upon him somehow makes him tense in anticipation. "- had the opportunity to sit down like this and speak to many others. Before- it was always busy, and our function, you understand, was not to discuss our thoughts. After- " his lips thin again. "- we were always fighting."

Relatch manages a weak laugh. "Hey, it's not like we get to socialize much here either. Maybe you and I have both just been desperate for company."

Even as the words leave his vocalizer, he knows it's not true. He's been here with Crimper for much, much longer and never felt this odd swirl of warmth and delight, never had this recognition of a kindred spark. There's a tug in his chest that makes his optics linger on the sharp angles of Mantelet's intimidating frame and on the coarse surface of the warframe's plating, wondering what it will feel like under his fingers. Mantelet clears his intake, and Relatch looks up at him - the large mech is slightly flushed, which can only mean that he noticed Relatch staring.

Relatch feels a bit embarrassed himself. He's not normally that forward.

It isn't even an entire deca-cycle before the inevitable happens and they fall into berth together.

Relatch might be a lot more concerned about how easy this makes him look if he had enough processing power to divert away from the helm between his legs and the sensations that that persistently-licking glossa is giving him. He can't stop moaning as he pushes his valve harder against that questing mouth, feeling his own lubricant trickle hotly down the insides of his upper thighs. Mantelet's arms are bracketing his hips, as immovable as steel bars holding him down, and all he can do is squirm and buck and beg in that vice grip.

"You taste good," Mantelet murmurs, lips still pressed against the very heat of him. The low, raspy voice sends shivers throughout Relatch's entire frame. "I could just keep drinking you down like this."

Relatch has to stuff a fist into his own mouth to keep from whimpering. Mantelet returns to his self-appointed task, licking languorously and swirling glorious circles over Relatch's swollen node.

"Please, more," he can hardly believe that it is his voice, wrecked by static and pleading. "Don't stop."

He can feel Mantelet's amusement and desire, the warframe's field crashing over his own desperately-aroused one. "I won't."

He doesn't know how long he lies there, writhing and imploring, spread open so wantonly that he would be mortified if he stopped to think about how he looked. Mantelet is merciless in giving pleasure, alternating between fumbling large fingers, slippery glossa and sharp dentae, and seems determined to find all the ways he can make Relatch thrash under him. Before he knows it, before he can give warning, ecstasy is spiraling up like a tidal wave and Relatch is muffling his wails with

his own hands. His frame jerks and crackles in an overload that keeps going and going and going.

By the time he surfaces enough from the fog in his processor, Mantelet has climbed over him on all fours, visor pulsing deeply. Relatch wonders fleetingly that he isn't afraid even though he's trapped under a frame so much bigger and more dangerous than his own - isn't even a fraction hesitant. He reaches up, pulls Mantelet's helm down to his, and answers the unspoken question with a kiss.

He's as prepared as he's ever been, but that hot, thick spike sliding into his valve still nearly feels like too much. It ignites his entire sensory net, setting his whole body aflame. Mantelet is moving painstakingly slowly, torturously drawing out every point of contact. It feels almost as though they've somehow combined - are somehow moving as one.

"You can- " Relatch manages to gasp out, his own fingers curling on the massive forearms around him, "- go faster. Harder."

Mantelet groans quietly, then leans down to nuzzle him. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You haven't," he reassures. "You won't."

It takes a bit longer, but Mantelet finally ups the pace. Relatch wraps his legs around the warframe's hips to take him deeper, static fritzing across his visual feed when Mantelet's spike drags deep across every single inch of his inner mesh. It feels good, so unspeakably good, and Relatch is racing back towards the edge again, panting and arching his back, pushing himself in counterpoint to the hard, sharp thrusts.

"I'm close," Mantelet bites out, voice strained. "Can I- "

"Yes," Relatch twists *just* so, and suddenly his node is rubbing hotly against the base of Mantelet's pelvic armor, sublime pressure through wet slick. Pleasure explodes in his circuits - he overloads again with a helpless, trembling moan, valve clamping down, every hydraulic tensing as the charge surges through him. "Yes!"

The warframe thrusts unevenly, vents stuttering, before slamming in one last time. A low groan spills from Mantelet's vocalizer as he holds himself deep, and Relatch feels the telltale hot dribble of transfluid as it seeps out around where they are joined.

He thinks he should say something, let Mantelet know just how processor-blowing that was at the very least, but all Relatch manages is a rather silly grin. From above him, Mantelet sighs softly, smiles a little back, and then dips down to kiss him again.

He doesn't know where the thought comes from, but it appears in his processor anyway. *Maybe the next time, we can share sparks.*

They fall into recharge in quiet comfort.

Relatch is awoken by a frantic thrashing next to him, and the blow across his faceplates catches him completely unaware. In the dark, pain and panic erupt across every line.

He whimpers, trying to shake the dizzying dregs of an interrupted recharge off and find an escape. The familiarity of his own habsuite is lost in a flurry of flailing limbs and pained grunts. Recent archival memory pulls up, flashes across his processor.

It's Mantelet.

It's Mantelet, growling and shaking and striking out in an error-loop of defragmentation. The large warframe's intake is open in a silent scream, and those heavy fists are clenching and pulling back for a blow-

Relatch flings himself off the side of the berth just in time, scrabbling up and hitting the switch to bring the lights on fully in the habsuite. He doesn't know what to do, but the agony on Mantelet's unconscious faceplates is spark-rendering. A quick check on his chronometer shows that it's the middle of the night - he *really* doesn't want to comm Crimper for what seems to be a nightmare.

"Mantelet?" he tries instead, voice shaky. "Hey, it's me. You're- you're safe here. Wake up!"

Nothing. Mantelet heaves another rattling vent as though there are shards of glass in his intake, and another thunderous blow dents a corner of the wall. Relatch cringes reflexively, but creeps forward.

"Mantelet?" he tries to use his field instead, pulsing comfort as far as he can push it. "Mantelet, wake up." He's back within arms reach now, and the rugged square helm turns towards his voice, as if desperately seeking.

"Shh, shh, it's me, Relatch. I'm here. You're safe," he croons, moving closer. Daringly and before he can stop to think it through, he lays a hand softly against a scowling faceplate. Mantelet jerks at that - and his visor finally blinks online.

Relief courses through Relatch so suddenly that he feels weak. "Hey," he whispers again, sagging on the side of the berth. "Welcome back."

Mantelet freezes for several nanokliks. His fists clench and unclench a few times. "Re-Relatch?" he asks slowly, and Relatch's tank tightens at how small the large warframe sounds.

"Yea, it's me," he rushes to say, lifting his hand gently. "We, uh, slept together last night. Do you remember?"

Mantelet lurches up, pressing the heel of a hand to his visor, hard. "Yes," he replies softly after a moment. "I remember." He's shaking ever so slightly.

Relatch sits himself cautiously back on the berth. He holds out a servo, palm-up, in wordless invitation. "It's okay. You're okay." It's another long few nanokliks before Mantelet finally slides his own hand over Relatch's.

The triumph is short-lived; when Mantelet raises his visor to Relatch's face, he goes so rigid that Relatch stills as well. Horror swamps the large warframe's field.

"Did I- do that?"

Oh. He'd forgotten about the throbbing ache on his own faceplates. Relatch touches his nasal ridge experimentally and immediately winces. It's been smashed in, along with the small plate above his lip. Now that he notices it, he can feel the energon trickling down the side of his mouth in a thin line, stickily wetting the cables of his throat.

Mantelet drops his hand and rears back so quickly that Relatch is almost pushed off-balance. "I hurt you," he says, disbelief and pain clear in the distraught blink of his visor, the stilted growl in his voice. "It was the last thing I wanted to do but- I hurt you."

Relatch tries to offer a smile. It probably doesn't go over well by the way Mantelet shudders and shrinks back. "Hey. It was an accident. I know you didn't mean it."

“I’m sorry,” Mantelet whispers stiffly, and then he’s standing, shoving himself out of the berth, stumbling towards the door on unsteady legs. “Forgive me, Relatch. Forgive me.”

It’s a full deca-cycle before Mantelet will meet his optics again, and another two before Relatch manages to hold his hand without the larger mech flinching. He tows Mantelet towards the port window where they’d had their first spark-to-spark.

For the first joor, it’s just Relatch and the sound of his own voice. He points out the stars as best as he can and rambles on and on about the upkeep of the station and the strangest repairs he’s ever had to make. It’s slightly challenging to skirt around the topic of the ongoing war - it’s why the damaged ships end up here, after all - and he knows as he’s telling the stories that they are boring at best and annoying at worst. When Mantelet still doesn’t say anything, Relatch can feel his spark twist a little. He’s never thought of himself as a particularly insecure mech, but- he’s been lonelier than he cared to admit, and he’s never found anyone who seemed to hold his attention the way Mantelet has done since he first saw him. For all that their relationship has been so brief, he misses the way Mantelet wanted him. The way that Mantelet listened to him.

Feeling very small, he finally lets go of Mantelet’s hand. After a long moment, Mantelet vents softly and frustratedly. “Relatch,” the warframe tries in a low voice. “I’m not good for you. Whenever that next ship comes, I’ll be getting on it and going back to- to- ”

He can’t even say it. It makes Relatch certain that Mantelet’s recharge terrors are directly linked to whatever the warframe saw or did when he was fighting in the Sub-Noctium war.

“You don’t have to,” he says earnestly, wishing that Mantelet would just look at him. “You don’t have to fight.”

Mantelet bows his helm. “If we don’t win, then everything will have been for nothing. I just have to get better at it.” His voice hardens. “I *will* get better at it.”

Relatch tries asking Crimper about if there’s anything the old medic can do.

“I’m a doctor, not a psychologist,” Crimper answers roughly, though not unkindly. “It’d be best for him if he can find some professional help back home.”

For all that his spark hurts at the thought of Mantelet leaving, Relatch knows the right option when he hears it. He’ll just have to find some way to get Mantelet aboard a ship heading back towards Cybertron instead. And if their time together is limited by whenever that is going to happen, then Relatch might as well just give in to the helpless urge to push his luck.

He feels it when Mantelet’s resistance bends imperceptibly with every gesture of openness. He sees the reluctant yearning in the rippling light on the red visor when Mantelet thinks he’s not looking. When they finally kiss again under the heated spray of solvent in the washracks, Mantelet groans against his lips, defeated.

“I’m broken, Relatch,” the warframe mutters between kisses. “Can’t you see that? You should be afraid of me. Why aren’t you afraid of me?”

Relatch doesn’t know the answer to that question either. All he knows is that he is hungry for more - more touching, more talking, more time. He doesn’t feel afraid.

Mantelet only consents to moving into a shared habsuite with the provision of separate berths, tucked into the corners farthest away from each other as possible. When they do interface again,

Mantelet is careful, so careful, holding Relatch as though he is made of the thinnest glass. The warframe remains haunted by what happened after their first time, even though Relatch assures him that there is nothing to forgive. Mantelet still has recharge terrors and the wall on the side of his berth shows the violent brunt of it, but he has made Relatch swear not to wake him, not to come near when they occur.

It's only natural that they fall into a comfortable routine by the time the war comes to the planetoid.

Relatch notices it first, since he's on duty. The ship heading closer does not have Cybertronian markings and is of a size that would barely even fit into the dock. He stares at it thoughtfully, then tries to find a frequency with which to hail the visitors.

All of his comms go unanswered.

He knows that Mantelet is recharging after an exhausting night refilling and rearranging the crash drums, so he pings Crimper instead. The medic joins him at the viewing port, lips pursed. "I don't think- " the older mech begins, but before he can say anything else, the ship has opened fire.

They dive into the shielded levels. The sirens have automatically gone off, shrouding the hallways in warning, flashing red lights. Outside, the unmistakable sound of a missile launching precedes the rumbling boom above them and the sudden smell of smoke filling the vents.

"I'll get Mantelet!" Relatch shouts over the cacophony. "You get to the emergency shuttle and send the transmission!" Protocol dictates that they have to inform the nearest base in the event of attack - since the other outpost will probably be next.

Crimper nods and starts to run the other way. Relatch braces himself on the wall as the outpost shakes with the impact of a second missile. A stifling heat has descended - the upper levels must be on fire.

With single-minded determination, he plucks himself up and races towards his habsuite. With any luck, Mantelet will already have been shaken awake by the noise and will meet him halfway.

But there's no sign of the warframe as Relatch hurries down. Dread and worry come over him, making the fuel in his tank feel like it's curdling unpleasantly. He dashes through the last hallway, slamming his palm over the access panel to their shared room.

The door slides open, and his spark sinks.

Mantelet is unconscious on the berth, frame bent and shaking in excruciating jerks. He's clearly in the throes of a full-blown recharge terror, no doubt compounded by the harsh wailing of the sirens overhead and the damage the outpost is taking. But there's no time for a gentle awakening.

He dithers over Mantelet for only a moment before he plants his hands on the warframe's shoulders and shakes firmly. "Mantelet!" he has to yell to be heard over everything. "Mantelet, wake up! We have to go! We have to- "

Time stops, and Relatch doesn't understand what has happened.

He looks down at his chest. He can see the large drill embedded wholly through it but he can't seem to feel it. Dimly, he notices that energon is gurgling from his intake. His hands have lost their grip, coming down to swing uselessly against his sides.

Worst of all is the look in Mantelet's visor as it increases painfully in brightness. There's a dawning realization, followed closely by a manic and abject denial. The warframe's mouth is open

but Relatch can't hear what Mantelet is gasping, and that large helm is beginning to shake frantically. Light streaks jaggedly down the rugged faceplates.

"No, no, no," it's hard to speak through the purging of what remains of his lines, leaking down the sides of his mouth. "Don't worry, Mantelet. Shh. We just have to get to the emergency shuttle. We'll be okay. We'll be okay." Has his vocalizer cut out as well? His processor is dimming at an alarming rate.

Be safe, he thinks, struggling to feel his arms, wishing he could press a kiss to Mantelet's helm to put the larger mech at ease. *I love you*.

He doesn't hear it when Mantelet starts to scream, and he doesn't feel the drill as it's pulled from his chest and he falls. But he thinks he can sense strong arms coming up around him to hold him tightly, and they rock him to blessed oblivion as the outpost burns and crumbles down around them.

Chapter End Notes

Relatch - Rodimus
Mantelet - Megatron
Crimper - Ratchet

Third Time

Chapter Notes

The wonderful @Miner_Issue has made fanart for Magnalock/Fiberfoil from the chapter "First Time" - see it [here](#)!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Heatlight checks his reflection methodically in the mirror.

The fresh shimmering paint gleams in detailed strokes over his modified wings and stands out crisply against his faceplates. The exquisite crystal-and-metalwork of his conjunx's House has been magnetized carefully with fervent precision on his frame. He's been polished and waxed to a lustrous sheen.

Now he's fit for display.

His conjunx - Senator Pylon to everyone else - has prepared a party lavish even by their normal standards tonight. It's a mere two deca-cycles before the next election, a perfect time to confirm gained allies and win some last votes.

Heatlight has been tasked with the usual: to stand around and be as alluring a trophy as possible, showcasing the scope of Pylon's influence and power. Maybe even tempt a few of the more 'radical elements', as his conjunx likes to put it, into compromising on one thing or another in exchange for a night of passion. Heatlight shies away from those particular archived memories. None of them have been very good, and all of them have made him feel...

Used.

He shakes his helm to dispel the gloom settling in and reaches for unfeeling calm instead. He will do this as he always has. It's simply what's expected for a mech of his position.

He wonders who will be at the party tonight.

By the time he's summoned to make his entrance, all the guests have arrived. He watches them for a moment from the top of the stairway. They mill about, toasting each other with richly flavored fuel, biting almost-crudely into luscious treats that flake all over onto their shiny plating. He steps out of the shadows.

Heatlight knows the instant he's seen. He knows how good he looks. A collective hush falls over the room, punctuated only by some low, salacious appreciation and the odd half-click of an accidentally-loosened panel.

He's escorted to a dais where Pylon stands in performative courtesy, reaching out to draw him close by the hand. "Everyone," he says, smiling the brilliant smile of the consummate politician, "May I present my conjunx? This is Heatlight."

"Senator *Pylon*," the streamlined purple mech next to him says approvingly, though the light red gaze has anchored fixedly on Heatlight. "I've heard of the rumored beauty of your conjunx, but I have to say that reality far surpasses any word that could be spoken. May I enquire as to where you

found such a jewel?"

Pylon laughs heartily. "You may enquire, my friend. Heatlight hails from that new city of Vos. It was not so long ago that I was sent there on official business to negotiate some trade agreements, and when I laid my optics on him, I knew instantly that he was worth...why, all the comfort and luxuries that credits could buy."

"Indeed," the mech agrees. At Pylon's widening smile, the purple mech turns to Heatlight, inclining his helm. "I am Starflayer, head of the Gamma commerce organization. I have been considering moving our headquarters to Vos myself, since it appears that they are quite partial to fliers. It would be most...desirable to hear more about what it's really like from a native." He twitches one of his slim gray wings casually, but in wing-speak, the blatant interest makes Heatlight flush. Starflayer's optics brighten incrementally at his reaction.

"Starflayer," a deep resonant voice breaks in from behind Heatlight before he can be flustered further. "Have you begun the discussion for raising the quota of purchased supplies with our esteemed Senator yet?"

It's not polite to turn his back on his conjunx and Starflayer, but the pull of the new presence's hot, heavy field is oddly irresistible. Heatlight is turning before he knows it, intake suddenly dry.

An imposing black-and-gunmetal mech stands there; he is so large and thickly-armored that Heatlight faintly wonders how he never heard him nearing. Sharp golden optics flick towards Heatlight and scan him cursorily before the mech brushes past him to address Starflayer.

"Ah," Pylon says delicately. "And you are?"

Starflayer's smile is a little thin. "Senator, please meet Glacis. Gamma's director of security." He seems to cower slightly under the large mech's glower. "Glacis, the Senator and I were just getting started. We'll get to everything in good time. Why don't you relax and enjoy the party meanwhile?"

Glacis snorts, and Pylon's gaze narrows a fraction. Starflayer's expression begins to show a tinge of strain.

"Heatlight," his conjunx says smoothly after a moment. "Perhaps you can show our honored guest around? Get him a drink and make him...comfortable?"

For a nanoklik, Glacis' field whips with anger. It's gone so quickly that Heatlight wonders if he imagined it.

"Of course," he belatedly replies, realizing his conjunx is looking at him pointedly. He raises a hand and places it lightly on Glacis' arm - and though it's just a ghost of a touch, he swears he feels a crackle of charge leap from the intimidating mech's armor to his fingers.

Glacis stops. The golden optics return to Heatlight, this time taking him in more intently. Behind the mistrust simmering there is a flicker of confusion.

"Let's go this way," Heatlight suggests diplomatically, coaxing his unwilling new social partner around.

They head towards the refreshments table where Heatlight fetches them small cubes of twice-refined high grade. Glacis stares at the proffered drink suspiciously, then watches when Heatlight raises his own cube to take a sip. As the cool fuel wets his intake, Glacis' focus locks on his swallowing throat.

It sends a flare of heat into Heatlight's circuitry.

"You're the Senator's conjunx," Glacis says blandly, knocking back his cube after a moment's pause. The drinking vessel looks comically small in his enormous servo.

"Yes," he replies, dipping his helm. "I am Heatlight."

"And do you have any opinions on your conjunx's discriminatory policies, Heatlight?"

The question is delivered so bluntly that at first Heatlight thinks he must have misheard. "Excuse me?"

Glacis snorts again. "You heard it right the first time."

This is not the kind of topic that should be addressed in the middle of a crowded party where anyone can hear. It's been a long time since there have been any such overt dissenters to Pylon's governance.

So Heatlight's duty, as always, is clear. He gathers himself, then gestures towards the row of semi-enclosed balconies overlooking the compound outside. "Perhaps we can discuss your viewpoint with a bit more privacy?"

When they step out into the cool of the night, Heatlight unties the ribbons holding the mesh curtains apart, letting the covering swing down as a partition between them and the rest of the party. The noise dulls instantly. It's almost peaceful.

"Is this how the good Senator usually makes his disagreeable guests more 'comfortable'?"

He stiffens at the mocking tone. "I'm not sure I know what you're implying."

Glacis comes up to stand behind him, close enough that Heatlight can feel the heat emanating off that reinforced armor even without direct contact. When Glacis bends to whisper into his audial, Heatlight's frame shivers involuntarily. That voice curls over his plating like smoke, like an almost tangible caress.

"I've never taken an unwilling mech, Heatlight. I'm not going to start with you."

He has to make himself stop trembling. That is- new. By this point, all the others had already started touching him, opening their panels to take their pleasure. No one has ever stopped.

No one has ever asked.

For one moment, Heatlight hates that he leaps at the idea that this might all be a trick, a test engineered by Pylon to see if he's behaving the way he should. But Glacis' field is as definite and steady as the rest of him. Heatlight's spark almost trips at how *safe* it makes him feel.

"Can we- " he hates the way his voice wobbles. "Would you like to talk about something instead?"

He feels more than sees when Glacis smirks, moving away from him in the dim light. "Sure. Which of those reprehensible policies should we start with?"

The datapad of poetry arrives five days later.

It comes in with all the other usual small gifts that are sent in a steady stream to Pylon, 'goodwill

trinkets' that range from boxes of cloudy crystal flowers to the highest grades of engex distilled with rare minerals. Most of the valuable items disappear quickly into Pylon's private study but the others are left out on the common table where the housekeeping drones come to clear them away after a duration.

But for the first time, something is addressed to him. Heatlight hesitates before plucking the datapad from the pile. He's never had anything sent to him personally, and he can't imagine what purpose such a gesture could possibly serve. He has no say in any of Pylon's politics, after all.

He brings the datapad with him to the balcony. Since the night of the party, Heatlight has found himself going back often to that secluded corner, warm in the memory of simply having been treated normally.

Glacis had gotten himself rather worked up when they'd started discussing the barriers to upward mobility. It had been refreshing for Heatlight to be asked what he thought, even though he'd been outright accused, several times, of being naive. He'd not been called upon to share whatever was on his processor in such a long time.

A trophy didn't need to have opinions.

The poetry is winding in parts and not easy to interpret, but Heatlight finds himself smiling when he reaches the end anyway. He opens the small file attached to the author's notes, and then his spark starts to pulse faster.

It's a comm code. There is no designation or message with it.

It's hard not to swing his helm up to check if he's being watched. There's nothing that points to the datapad being from Glacis, but somehow, Heatlight has never been so certain. The wonderful, terrible connotations of the gift, of the private line being offered - deep in his core, Heatlight already knows what he's going to do.

They end up meeting at a mostly-empty theater in the middle of the day. Heatlight has come out on the pretext of catching an obscure play, something that Pylon has absolutely no interest in unless it comes with a media opportunity. With his status, Heatlight has a loge to himself, and he has ordered the guard sent with him to stay outside.

Sometime between the first act and the second, he feels the magnetic brush of the tantalizing EM field that he has tried so hard to recall and forget in turns these past nights. Strong fingers graze deceptively lightly along his shoulder.

"Are you sure?" Glacis murmurs.

Heatlight pushes himself to stand, though his hydraulics feel shaky. As he turns, Glacis' arms come up to wrap around him, dominating and possessive.

"Yes," he says, and the *want* in his voice startles himself. "Yes."

He is laid down surprisingly gently, knees scuffing against the padded floor of the loge as he clings to the chair and tries to muffle his moans into the seat. Glacis sinks into him from behind, all heat and raw, barely-leashed strength. Large hands anchor on his waist and pull him back to meet each powerful thrust again and again. Heatlight can feel how soaking wet he is where they connect, can feel the hot vents gusting over his back and how they gradually change from steady to erratic. He arches, pushes himself back to take it deeper and harder, and barely manages to stifle his cry when he overloads around the pulsing heat inside him.

Afterwards, Glacis shifts them, pulling Heatlight up so that he's curled against that broad, thrumming chest. They listen idly to the bickering of the fourth act as their frames cool, and Glacis strokes a warm hand lazily along his side.

"I find myself wondering if we've met before, Heatlight."

He twists to meet the unsettled look in dim golden optics. "I think I would have remembered if we had," he answers honestly, fingers sliding over the front of the bigger mech's armor. "You're not exactly forgettable."

The distant look in Glacis' gaze softens by degrees. "I would say the same for you."

They meet every two or three days after that. There's an unquenchable thirst in Heatlight's frame and spark, a hungry yearning that sends charge skittering under his armor whenever he thinks of his new lover. But there are only so many times he can go to the theater without arousing Pylon's suspicions, so Heatlight forces himself to start paying more attention to where his conjunx schedules his various appointments so that he can arrange to be on the other end of the city. Pylon has been getting increasingly irritable as the date for the election draws near, sometimes shouting from his study at some hapless aide or another. Heatlight overhears a little when he walks past the closed door - various business investments that Pylon has made are not turning as much of a profit as they used to, which means less funds with which to run his campaign and line his own coffers.

It doesn't matter. If Heatlight has to forgo some of the extravagant indulgences and opulence in exchange for Pylon leaving him alone, he'll take it. He hasn't felt this reckless or free in too long. It's an addictive feeling.

What is also addictive is the way Glacis rocks into him, pushing Heatlight's legs back and up and bending his limber frame almost in half. He's bracketed by massive arms, and in this position, he can feel every inch and ridge as Glacis pounds relentlessly into his swollen, dripping valve. His fingers scrabble for purchase on the berth when the other mech reaches down between them and presses hard circles onto his node. Heatlight writhes and jerks and overloads with a desperate moan.

The sound of their whirring fans has not completely faded away when Glacis abruptly asks, "Why do you stay? You're surely not in love, and you're nothing but a plaything to him."

Even if Heatlight knows it's true, it still hurts to hear it put so brusquely. He can't help the reflexive flinch.

It sounds so silly to say that he'd leapt at the chance to be important. Pylon had wooed him with charming promises of being able to make a difference, had showered him with compliments that made him feel appreciated and heard. The expensive presents and the vague allusions to traveling and seeing the universe together hadn't hurt either.

Instead, he is now an ornamental symbol of the Senator's privilege and wealth. It is too painful to admit, even to himself, that he made a prideful mistake.

His existence seems to be compiled only of mistake upon mistake.

When Heatlight doesn't answer after too long, Glacis vents quietly and pulls him close. "Infuriating," he mutters to the top of Heatlight's helm. Heatlight doesn't know what Glacis is referring to - the situation, or Heatlight himself. The uncertainty makes his spark shrink in on itself

in perceived rejection, but he can't bear the thought of leaving the tightening circle of Glacis' arms either.

He's always afraid it might be the last time.

Once again polished to a shine, wearing an opalescent wax and a finely-strung golden lattice that sways enticingly between his wings, Heatlight makes his way up the steps of the palatial hotel on Pylon's arm. It's yet another party that Pylon has insisted they attend.

The moment they cross the threshold of the fancy ballroom, Pylon pats Heatlight's hand distractedly before pulling his arm away. "I'm just going to see if I can talk to some of the other Senators," his conjunx says, optics already scanning the room a touch wildly. "You can just...get something to eat. Make sure you're seen. Show off that lovely expensive jewelry, hm?"

It isn't all that different from the usual, but it still stings to be left so abruptly alone. Heatlight can feel it - the admiring gazes on him, increasingly mixed with pity these days. It bruises something fragile in his processor, makes him wish he was anywhere but here.

He drifts to the table where fuel and snacks are piled high, though his tank feels constricted. The gentle strains of ambient music trickle into his audials from high overhead. Heatlight has to stifle a sudden, self-deprecating laugh, because here he is, far from home, more gilded than he's ever been and surrounded by all the luxuries he's always wished he had - and his spark is shrinking in a sense of abandonment he should have gotten used to long ago.

Better to have been poorer, to have had far less - he'd at least been able to chase the stars with the power of his own wings, dirty and scuffed though they might have been.

How can he tell anyone this? That he wishes for the gutter over the glitter, that the weight of his finery sits like shackles on his grounded frame? If he could only start all over again from nothing...

A large servo lands on the small of his back, and he can't stop himself from jerking in surprise. His gaze follows the limb up to a rather intoxicated Senator that Pylon has made Heatlight keep company with before, and he suddenly remembers with alarming clarity the dents that had been left on his frame after that particular occasion.

So the smile that he gives is weak, if diplomatic, and Heatlight hopes that his inching backwards is taken as a casual movement rather than a slight. "Senator Crashcourse. How wonderful to see you here."

Crashcourse winks at him, pressing him closer and trapping him against the table. "The pleasure is all mine, sweetspark. Why, Pylon should really know better than to leave you alone when you're so tempting. What say you we take off to my private room while he's off somewher- nghhh!"

"My apologies for interrupting," Glacis bites out, as though he hasn't just caught Crashcourse's wandering hand in a grip that looks like it could bend steel. "I have been instructed to fetch the Senator's conjunx to him. May I?"

Crashcourse's optics have bleached white with drunken outrage, but as they track over the sheer breadth and mass of the glowering security director, he visibly seems to think better of making a scene. The Senator yanks his arm back, though it takes a second try before Glacis releases him, and then he shoots the larger mech a look of pure spite before flouncing off without even a token excuse to Heatlight.

They stand in silence, watching him go.

It takes almost a full klik before Heatlight can clear his dry intake. "So- Pylon sent you for me?" His frame, unbidden, is already warming despite the unwelcome prospect of joining his conjunx; Glacis' proximity simply has that effect on him. He can't stop his gaze from straying over the gray pauldrons, the black chestplate that he knows the intimate curve of.

"Follow me," Glacis says shortly.

They make their way without further incident into a large lift, heading for one of the upper levels. Heatlight wonders, suddenly, if Pylon is offering him up to Starflayer - that's the only reason that could explain Glacis being on this errand after all. He wonders that he doesn't feel nervous or nauseous, only inexplicably hurt - despite the fact that this isn't the first time - and resigned.

They stop at a door and Glacis punches in a code with more vehemence than is probably necessary. Heatlight trails his lover into a spacious room, bright and warm with cosy lights. He notices, absentmindedly, that the soft ambient music continues even here. Then he steels himself before raising his optics, only to see with no small amount of confusion that...

There's no one else in the room.

The door slides shut behind him, and Glacis whirls around. Fury paints every stark line of the strong rigid frame, in the smoldering golden optics that glare at him.

"Have you no concept of saving yourself?" Glacis demands harshly. "Do you think you can do nothing else but follow the whims of these grotesque caricatures of authority?! There isn't always going to be someone to step in and take you away!"

Heatlight recoils instinctively from the shout before the words even sink in. And then it registers that- that he's being *accused*. The relief that had bloomed when he'd realized Pylon wasn't there gives way to something wounded and defensive.

"Do you think I *want* to offer myself up?!" he hisses. "You don't understand anything! I made my choice, and now all I can do is live with the consequences of that decision!"

Glacis storms forward, backing Heatlight into the corner. "Choices can be remade," he growls. "But you have to take that step on your own. If you want something, you have to make it happen! No one is going to just give you what you wish for!"

Heatlight finds himself shaking. He's angry, and pained, and most of all, he hates himself because he knows Glacis is right. He knows that he's wished that Glacis could be the one to give him what he wants, to step in and save him, to do precisely all of the things that he can't seem to find the will to do himself. He stares bitterly into the golden optics, his spark aching so terribly that it seems to burn in his chest.

And then they're kissing, frenziedly, with a savagery that should scare him, but all he can think or see or hear is the heat and hardness of Glacis, inside him and all around him.

The unimaginable has happened. He's no longer a *Senator's* conjunx.

It's strange how numb Heatlight feels as Pylon rages and smashes expensive decanters and furniture. Everything has changed so suddenly. He is aware, with a distant sort of sick feeling, that he's gone from being a lusted-after treasure to a burden overnight. A common mech will have no

need - and no resources - to keep or maintain a trophy conjunx.

“That backstabbing little cog,” Pylon snarls, ripping out a small table from where it was welded to the ground. “I introduced him to my contacts and how did he repay me? He undercut my goods before buying out my factories one by one. He’s consolidated his influence under that sham of a commerce organization, and now he takes my seat on the Senate? I should kill him. I’ll kill him!”

Something in the rant catches Heatlight’s attention. “...commerce organization?” he says finally.

Pylon tears the lamps from the walls. “Starflyer!” he hisses viciously. “Remember that traitorous name. Why, he must think he’s been so very clever, distracting me again and again with some high society gathering or another. He and his ill-mannered ‘director of security’ must have had this planned from the start!”

For one long second, it feels like Heatlight’s spark has stopped spinning. “From...the party that time?” he manages.

“To think I- oh yes. That’s right. You serviced the big brute then, didn’t you?” Pylon’s optics are wild. “Go to him! Ask him to make Starflyer return what is rightfully mine! I’ll- I’ll consider giving up the seat in the Senate, but I demand the return of my properties!”

Something cold is swamping his circuits. His emotional sub-unit is throwing up conflicting data strings at a rate that’s locking his limbs up. Pylon wants him to trade his frame as a last resort to buy back the material wealth he used to own? The Gamma commerce organization has had their sights on Pylon since the moment they arrived? But that can only mean that- that-

That Glacis has known this would happen all along.

Has Heatlight been- nothing but a part of the prize from the beginning?

His plating is starting to rattle. He can’t think, can’t move in the face of Pylon’s terrible crazed anger.

“Here, take this!” his conjunx stumbles over to what’s left of an ornate desk, throwing a drawer open and lifting out a securely-locked case. It takes three tries for Pylon to input the code correctly with his shaking digits, and when it’s finally open, he snatches two dark vials from a row of many more. “Put this in their fuel when you see them! That will teach them to mess with their betters. They’ll be dead before they walk into the Senate!”

A message pops up in Heatlight’s HUD. It’s anonymous, offering only a set of coordinates. And three words.

Come with me.

“What are you still standing around for?!” Pylon shrieks at him. “Get going!” The vials are shoved into Heatlight’s hands, and then he’s all but thrown out.

He stands there, alone in the cold and staring out at nothing for far, far too long.

Come with me.

What else could Glacis possibly want? Is Heatlight still a part of the victor’s spoils? Is this the last cruelty that Starflyer and Glacis have plotted in their takeover scheme to leave Pylon with nothing, and Heatlight only a pawn?

Come with me.

He can't fathom what Glacis is thinking like this. Heatlight has to- has to see him. Speak to him. Ask what the truth really is and hear it with his own audials.

Before he can stop himself, he's staggering, then walking, then running in the direction of those coordinates. With the showy modifications to his wings that Pylon insisted he get, it's been too long since he was able to fly - but it's not so very far. Briefly, fervently, Heatlight wishes that he was a racer, with all the smooth curves and roaring speed of those lithe frames.

How long has it been since he received the message? Will Glacis be there waiting? What will Heatlight say to him?

After what feels like an eternity of running, he arrives at the designated spot, skidding to a stop, vents flaring wide and condensation trickling down his plating. His systems are all overheating and he sinks to the ground, gulping cool air.

It takes him several clicks to realize that he's alone.

Heatlight checks the coordinates again, looking around. No, he's definitely in the right place. He hesitates, then fumbles with the only comm code that he was ever given, that he still has in his log - the one he received with the datapad of poetry.

The line is dead.

No matter. Heatlight can wait a while. He thinks, dully, that Glacis must be busy assisting Starflayer in appropriating all of Pylon's assets.

He despises that he can't entirely extinguish the flicker of longing. Different ideas bat wildly in his processor for priority. Indistinctly, Heatlight knows what he's really hoping for: he can't stop praying that even half of what they've had is real. With every bolt of his frame, he longs fiercely and wretchedly for that sensation of safety. The memories of Glacis' encompassing embrace, the heavy protective weight of Glacis' frame above his, the sound of Glacis' low calm voice pressed against his cheek. All of it is still too near. Too sweet.

But the joors pass by, and no one arrives.

He suddenly notices how deserted it is around him. He's been led to the very outskirts of the city, the only other mechanism in sight a distantly-visible border maintenance drone and its accompanying trailer of junk. Fear swoops down, sinking its claws into his frame.

It becomes impossible not to shiver, impossible to dismiss the warnings of the painful hot charge rising in the filaments of his optics. He hasn't fueled for a while now, and his levels are dipping into the red but he can't seem to make himself move.

When the day finally breaks, there's nothing for it but to acknowledge the chilly kernel of truth that's taken root in his chest.

Glacis isn't coming. His lover's voice echoes in his audials.

No one is going to just give you what you wish for.

So.

The message was nothing but a final mockery, proving to Heatlight the extent of his ridiculous

naivete. Showing him in brutal clarity the ease with which he has been manipulated. Teaching him the lesson he has refused to learn all this time.

And now he's been abandoned.

The facts spin sluggishly in his processor. He can't go back to Pylon, not without having done what his conjunx ordered. There's nothing else for Heatlight in that empty house. He won't go back and *look* for Glacis, beg pathetically for yet more scraps of disingenuous affection. Glacis is likely boasting even now to Starflayer - or worse, to Pylon - of their affair.

The despairing sobs, great and heaving, throttle his intake then. He vents too hard and falls to his knees, beating his fists weakly on the ground with the scraps of strength he has left. His spark feels like it's splintering excruciatingly in its chamber, and it's all Heatlight can do not to open his chestplates right there and then to tear it out. The betrayal and grief cut so deeply that it makes his systems stutter and stall.

There is nowhere to go and no one to turn to. He is completely and utterly alone, at the end of a path that he has never had the courage to turn back from. He cries and he cries and he cries until it hurts to move, until the warnings of dangerously-low coolant levels join the blinking alerts of his squeezing tank.

He uncurls his servos. Looks down at the two slim tubes of mercy he's been unintentionally granted.

I've been such a fool.

He unseals the vials with trembling fingers and pours their contents down his intake. And then he curls up tight, and lets the agony of the spreading rust consume his screaming spark.

Chapter End Notes

Heatlight - Rodimus

Glacis - Megatron

Starflayer - Starscream

A/N: Clearly, the events of this lifetime are seen only from Heatlight's perspective. We'll never know if Glacis really abandoned Heatlight, or if something happened to him to stop him from showing up.

Well. Unless I get around to writing the companion pieces of this fic from the POV of Megatron's incarnations.

Fourth Time

Chapter Notes

Much of the dialog in this chapter has been liberally repurposed straight from the comics because I couldn't resist making this as canon as possible.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hot Rod's first proper look at Megatron sends an odd jolt through his chest.

But he has no time to concentrate on it, because the Decepticon leader has started talking. Hot Rod senses right away that they're not on the same wavelength - Megatron praises the fact that Hot Rod has just burned Nyon down to the ground and thwarted Zeta's ruthless endeavors. The larger mech's merciless conviction of the necessity of sacrifice is both jarring and excruciating in light of the genocide that Hot Rod just been forced to commit.

"A true leader acts without doubt or regret," Megatron says firmly, and his red-opticked gaze is as cold and unyielding as steel. "Those are for the weak. *You* are made of sterner stuff. You should come with us." A pause, and then, in a lower, persuasive voice that sends a frisson of heat through Hot Rod's circuits, "Come with *me*."

Hot Rod is not so sure about that. He's not sure about that at all.

The final straw is when Starscream hauls Bumblebee into the citadel. Energon is leaking freely down the latter's lacerated faceplates. Hot Rod doesn't know Bumblebee, not really; he's only just met the Autobot. But something in him twists at the obvious signs of torture.

He can't go with Megatron. Not when things are like this.

He sneaks down to the detention cells where he knows the rest of the Autobots are imprisoned. Thundercracker looms in the way, dismissive and threatening. Hot Rod's bluff is called the moment he utters it and he's left with no choice.

He fires his blaster in a wild arc, hoping that at least one of the shots will disable the security field. He gets lucky. The ensuing escape is punctuated with smoke and blaster fire, but they successfully make it out.

It's hard for him to explain when Bumblebee asks why he risked himself. Hot Rod really doesn't want his people to have died for nothing. Megatron is clearly bent on replacing one autocracy with another, so if the Autobots are fighting for freedom, he'll go with them.

When he sees Orion, now reborn as Optimus Prime, it feels like a confirmation somehow that he has chosen the right side. Hot Rod doesn't know what kind of higher power would have allowed such a senseless loss of his home and all the other mechs who lived with him in it, but there's no denying that Optimus looks divinely remade. It's inspiring.

Then they go back to the citadel for a final confrontation, and Hot Rod encounters Megatron once more.

His spark flips again. He can't quite decide if it's due to the fact that he's being held hostage, or

that the growl of Megatron's powerful engine against his back is making his frame react extremely inappropriately to the dangerous situation. He manages to heed Optimus' instruction through the distracted haze in his processor, transforming at the last second and escaping the grip across his chassis. But when he turns back, the sudden sight of energon spilling down and across Megatron's helm sends his tank into a distressed clench.

What's wrong with him? He has chosen a side. He should be cheering at Optimus' victory.

But he can't do it. Something in his chest is pulling inexorably at him, whispering that Megatron is important somehow, for all his violence and hubris. When Soundwave appears in the air above the Decepticon leader and stretches out a servo, all Hot Rod can feel is a thrumming sense of agitated relief.

He feels like a fraud when he's taken aside by Optimus later and gently thanked and comforted. Hot Rod has always wanted to be a hero, but it doesn't feel right that he should be named one when the energon of Nyon is still fresh and hot on his hands.

When he can't stop thinking of the fierceness of Megatron's optics, and the seductive strength of that massive frame.

So he bites out a self-deprecating chuckle when Optimus says it could be him carrying the Matrix one day. Wouldn't that be something?

Hot Rod briefly wonders if 'impulsive' or 'reckless' are really qualities that he wants permanently added to his resume.

It seems that he's been making nothing but one bad decision after another of late. First the frustration with Optimus for resigning his position, then going off on his own, then accepting Swindle's foolish flattery and working together with the Decepticons to build a new space cruiser. Hot Rod had honestly, sincerely hoped that it would be a start towards normalizing cooperation between the factions. A small part of him still fantasizes about being the one to broker a peace and end the civil war, so that when all has come to pass, he'll be more than free to-

Then he's challenged by Ultra Magnus and betrayed by Swindle. He returns to fight alongside the Autobots and they manage to bring down Menasor, only for his comrades-in-arms to shun him for his lousy choices. It's hard not to take it personally.

So yes, perhaps hijacking Ultra Magnus' ship and heading towards a Decepticon asteroid base isn't one of his finest ideas. But he has to make amends somehow and prove himself again so that he won't be thrown out. Or dismissed. He does spare a moment to berate himself for his pitiful need for approval and belonging, because Hot Rod knows, he *does*, that he shouldn't be a slave to his own glitching processor. But it's all he has.

So he charges in, charges straight for Starscream, optics locked on the Matrix swinging from a thick chain around the flier's throat. Starscream all but mocks his paltry efforts; every shot from Hot Rod's blaster seems to have no effect on that heavily-reinforced armor. In a final desperate bid, he shoots at the Matrix itself. The resulting energy discharge knocks Starscream unconscious, and Hot Rod can barely believe it.

He's gotten lucky again.

He grabs the artifact and makes a run for it, except that his luck doesn't hold because when he

rounds the last corner to the dock, he sees the face that has haunted him through countless restless nights of recharge. His rationalization unit fritzes, torn between wanting to flee (for good reason) and wanting to stay (for no explicable reason at all).

And then the massive cannon blasts a huge hole through his frame and Hot Rod stops thinking very much. As his systems collapse one by one and he drifts off into the unforgiving cold of space, the last thing he sees is the grim, angry look on Megatron's faceplates.

Hot Rod doesn't know why, but it makes his guttering spark ache.

When he returns to the Autobots with his Matrix-reformatted frame and Optimus christens him with his new name, the thrill and thankfulness that floods Rodimus' circuits is warm and soothing. He belongs somewhere again. He's important. He has places to be, places to go, and it helps to push all of the other nagging trivial thoughts from his mind for a time.

He doesn't expect it at all when Megatron surrenders. Doesn't expect the hot flash of discomfort and something strangely bitter when he sees how close Optimus and Megatron seem to be when they talk in the latter's cell about redemption and where to go from here. So he jumps at the chance to leave when Drift shares his vision for the Knights of Cybertron and buys a ship. Drift has always been a good friend.

And Rodimus has always wanted to see more of the universe.

A small voice in his processor points out that he's just running away, even if he can't quite put his finger on what he's running away from. The subsequent explosions and misadventures and the secret presence of a Decepticon Phase Sixer on board all do very well to distract him from the hollow feeling in his chest.

Then Megatron is assigned as co-captain of the Lost Light, and Rodimus abruptly realizes what exactly it was that he was trying to avoid.

He doesn't trust Megatron, and it's easier simply to snark at the former warlord and find little ways to annoy instead. Anything is better than acknowledging the way that Megatron's presence is drawing Rodimus in like a gravity well despite his best attempts to resist it. There's little of the vicious and unfeeling Decepticon leader that he remembers from before - this Megatron is serious and weary, and something at the edges of that massive field feels so very, very sad.

Several times, Rodimus feels that odd jolt again, the one he remembers from the time they first met. More than once, he thinks he catches a red-opticked glance turning his way with a strangely contemplative look, but Rodimus tries to bustle off before any contact can be made.

He doesn't trust Megatron. He can't.

Until Getaway's mutiny throws everything into sharp relief, the impending threat of the Decepticon Justice Division even more so, and Rodimus suddenly realizes that he *does*, he *does* trust Megatron, and he's hard-pressed to point out when things changed.

Was it on Millarium when Megatron said, "Roll out!" for the first time and Rodimus couldn't quite stifle the inward snicker? Was it during one of the boring, boring history lessons on pre-Functionist folklore, when Megatron's voice usually evened out into a lulling and meaningless buzz at the back of Rodimus' processing? Was it when Rodimus had eavesdropped on Velocity and Megatron from outside the latter's quarters and heard Megatron say, in a deeply reflective and honest way,

that he had never been happier? Or was it when Megatron had informed Minimus Ambus that Rodimus liked using bad grammar to divert the loadbearer's attention from whatever he was usually in the midst of objecting to?

The knowledge that Megatron has been observing him, *knows* him, and feels comfortable enough to call Rodimus out in that irresistibly dry, sardonic voice makes his spark skip a revolution.

He suddenly realizes how much he likes it - that Megatron is clever and sharp and strong, as grounding as coordinates across a spacebridge. Rodimus likes how he can throw the worst of his impetuous ideas and selfish motivations at Megatron, and how Megatron doesn't hesitate the slightest in challenging him back. That piercing red gaze slices through all of Rodimus' bluster in a manner that forces him to confront the ugliest parts of himself, and for all of that there is no *judgment*, none of that condescending disappointment that Rodimus has been used to receiving all his life. The way that their faults rub and grind against each other is a masochistic sort of fulfilment, peppered all the way through with the smoldering attraction that Rodimus has never quite managed to extinguish.

All of which means that Rodimus is furious when Getaway accuses him of being part of Megatron's fan club, so angry when the Spec Ops traitor says that Rodimus has brought the mutiny upon himself with how he had progressively started accepting Megatron's change of spark, but he can't bring himself to be *sorry* that he did that. The fact that Megatron only bows his helm and doesn't say anything for the entire time that Getaway rants makes something fierce and protective unfurl in Rodimus' core.

Finding the teleport chamber is one more stroke of luck atop all the fine strokes of luck that Rodimus has surfed by on his entire functioning. The last time he'd had such luck was when he'd escaped with the Matrix and it'd changed his frame and his life. Megatron had put a real dampener on events back then, so of course he has to do it again now by announcing that he'll stay and fight the DJD.

"You're staying to protect the organics," Rodimus says flatly. "You."

"You have every right to be surprised."

"You'll die." He can't quite keep the tremor from his voice.

"I've made my choice, Rodimus." Megatron turns away. "You're free to make yours."

It's a struggle, but at the same time not at all. Something tells Rodimus that if he walks away now, if he turns his back and leaves, their paths will splinter irrevocably and he'll regret it forever.

It's surreal to see Megatron on a hot pink scooter, heading straight for the maws of the enemy. Rodimus can't resist planting himself in the way, leaning in to pop a distracted question or two about Megatron's motivations while he let his optics wander over the large, scuffed chassis. He idly wonders if it will feel the same against his back as that time he was taken hostage so very long ago. If that powerful engine will thrum as hot and heavy as Rodimus remembers.

He also wonders if Megatron and Tarn were ever lovers, and then he has to kick himself for letting his thoughts go there.

Anyway, it's a good thing that Rodimus has mastered the art of hanging around the front door unobtrusively because he's the first to see when Megatron returns in a mess. Rodimus comms Ratchet immediately and they manage to rush the former warlord to the makeshift medbay between them. For all the injuries that Rodimus has seen and suffered himself, the gaping wound in

Megatron's chest makes him feel especially ill. He can't lose Megatron, not now, not before they've even started and- whoa.

Where did that thought come from?

Rodimus has to stop and vent deeply a few times before he reluctantly takes a good hard look at the simmering entanglement in his emotional sub-unit.

If there is life after this debacle, if there is life out there for all of them - both of them - then Rodimus can be mech enough to admit that he thinks he would really, really like to spend some time with Megatron. He wants the full force of that magnetic gaze turned upon him, wants to talk to Megatron about a hundred thousand different things, wants to hear that husky rumbling voice reciting some blasted tedious tidbit of history in his audials, for him and him alone.

But they need to survive first. So it's with a doubly-disappointed flare of outrage and disbelief that he takes the news that Megatron doesn't want to fight.

"I'm not strong enough," Megatron bites out, and Rodimus wants to shake him until his bucket helm falls off.

"You're Megatron!" he shouts. "You can make half of them go home just by scowling! Is it the Fool's Energon? Is that what this is about?"

"It's not that," Megatron answers. "I suppose...I suppose I'm afraid."

"Good!" Rodimus yells back furiously. "Me too!" He's afraid, suddenly, that they will never get a chance. He's more afraid of that thought than the thought of charging out to meet five hundred Decepticons hollering for the fuel in their lines.

He takes the lead anyway, because that's what a captain does, and if it has to be just one of them fighting for an insane what-if maybe, it might as well be Rodimus. He's not entirely sure if the intensity of his flame-out is due to the lingering shock of his Megatron-related self-revelation or if it's the unnatural boosting effects of Skids' spark spasm, but it at least takes the edge off the sudden wretched longing.

His luck runs out again because of course it always does, and Rodimus finds himself backed into a tightening circle with his equally powered-down crew at his back.

"I'm sensing this is it, guys!" he calls as he fires. "Bright ideas very welcome!"

And then Megatron steps onto the field, fusion cannon smoking, and Rodimus has to discreetly hit himself to make sure his dreams have not infringed upon his reality.

"Get inside, all of you," Megatron grits. His gleaming red optics linger over the rents in Rodimus' armor, darken when they see the energon trickling down his pede. "I don't need your help - I don't need anybody's help."

"But- "

"Now!" Megatron roars and Rodimus flinches and obeys, tucking Ravage's broken frame securely into his alt mode as they all transform and race back towards the fortress. He can hear the *choom choom choom* of Megatron firing behind him, covering their retreat - the shots seem to ring out in perfect counterpoint to the rapid pulsing of his spark.

From the relative safety of the fortress, he sees it when Megatron activates the forcefield generator.

He sees it when Tarn pushes through. And he sees it when Megatron starts to pull the antimatter out *through his frame*.

If Megatron doesn't offline himself first, then Rodimus is going to kill him. The disbelief and despair are boiling in a hot maelstrom in his lines, punctured only by the anguished snarl of Megatron's voice.

I was at peace.

*I was **happy**.*

Rodimus manages to continue mumbling along with the distracted conversation of the awestruck crew until the point that Roller appears in the doorway with a time case clasped in one hand. Perhaps the way he rips it from Roller's grip is a tad rude, but Rodimus is beyond caring about niceties. He slams it down in front of Brainstorm and orders - pleads - for the scientist to calibrate it.

He can save him. He can save him.

As his frame is yanked forcefully through the space and temporal continuum, the drop out of the displacement is dizzying. "Megatron!" he screams, straining to reach. "Leave him! Take my hand!"

Megatron stares back at him, mouth set.

No. The alternative is unthinkable. Rodimus' spark is howling in its chamber. He thinks that Megatron might be able to hear it, because a large black servo finally lifts just in time to touch his own outstretched one.

It was too close a call.

That can be the only explanation for why Rodimus finds himself lurking behind a holographic statue of a mech he doesn't recognize, listening to the low indistinct conversation between Megatron and Terminus who are slouched together on the other side. He hears the sound of Megatron's brief, choked vents and all of the nonplussed reassurances that Terminus continues to offer, and Rodimus wonders if he'll be waiting the entire night, alone with this nameless, anxious turbulence pulsing insistently through his spark.

But at some point, Terminus stands and turns away to amble back towards the fortress. Megatron is silent until the elderly miner has disappeared from view.

Then his helm turns, just a fraction, towards where Rodimus has been lounging against the statue's base in the darkness.

He doesn't know who moves first, but they end up meeting halfway in the shadows. Rodimus' hands are reaching up as if they have a processor of their own, tugging that stubborn gray helm down, and Megatron's arms are winding around Rodimus and pulling him up off the ground. When they kiss, hotly and hungrily, it's almost as though something clicks into place, fitting so perfectly and intimately into an aching emptiness that he's never known was there.

He manages to tear one servo away from Megatron's faceplates long enough to fumble at the manual latch to Megatron's interface array. Megatron groans against Rodimus' lips, bucks shallowly against Rodimus' fingers, and then bears them both to the ground. Rodimus finds himself sprawled on all fours above Megatron, every hydraulic feeling weak. They don't break

their kiss.

Rodimus' panels open without his conscious input - his valve drags hot lubricant across Megatron's plating and his spike presses insistently against his own too-warm armor. From behind him and under him, nudging maddeningly at his aft, he can feel the large blunt tip of Megatron's fully-pressurized spike. All Rodimus can do is moan and angle his hips and try to push himself back on it.

"Easy," Megatron warns gruffly, the gentle nip at the corner of Rodimus' mouth belying the sudden steel grip on his waist. "I don't want to hurt you." *Not anymore*, is left unspoken.

He knows he should be at least a little anxious. Or having second thoughts. This is *Megatron*. A mech who has made a name for himself in bestowing pain above all else.

"You won't," Rodimus says, suddenly so certain that he can't explain it.

He straightens, though it's torture of a different kind to tear his mouth away. Then he scoots back, lifts himself on his knees, and lets himself sink down. Megatron stills, trembling slightly with the effort not to move, and the sound of his harsh venting pours like music into Rodimus' audials.

He begins to rock back and forth, taking a little more each time. The stretch is almost too much and feels so indescribably *good*. Rodimus can't remember the last time he was filled like this, if he was ever filled like this. If his spark has ever felt so full.

"Megs," his voice crackles as his fingers curl on the warm chestplates. "Take me."

Megatron stares up at him, optics glittering. There is a look on the ex-warlord's faceplates that Rodimus has never seen before. It feels like Megatron is studying all of his features one by one and memorizing them, as if Rodimus is a puzzle that he's abruptly figured out. It sends a flood of heat and curious tenderness over his circuitry, so strong that it makes Rodimus giddy.

Then he's rolled over and Megatron's larger hands are covering his own, and Rodimus lets his helm fall back. Megatron's thick spike slides in and out of him with so much wet slick that Rodimus would be embarrassed if he had the capacity to process it. He shivers, arching as the charge builds and builds and builds.

Megatron rears up and sits back, pulling Rodimus into his lap. The new position deepens the penetration, jolts every node and sensor along the way, and Rodimus scrabbles at the broad gray shoulders as his hips buck helplessly. Megatron's fingers are hot and slippery as they stroke over the sensitive entrance where their arrays are joined, lightly flicking and caressing before moving to rub across his swollen node. Rodimus overloads forcefully with a muffled cry, barely aware when Megatron groans and follows him over with a jerk of his hips and a crushing grip on Rodimus' aft.

Then Megatron's servo is under his chin, tipping Rodimus' face up, and when their lips meet again, Rodimus instinctively knows that this is *right*.

They've belonged together all along.

"Hello," Megatron says drolly, and all of Rodimus' objective protocols fly out the proverbial window.

"You-?!" the rage and the doubt are choking his intake, but most of all - worst of all - so is the *relief*. His spark feels like it's skittering. Rodimus elects to blame that on the fact that an entire

invasion appears to be making its way through the Warren portal, rather than on the fact that- that-

It's been four weeks since Megatron broke his word and remained behind in the Functionist universe. Four of the longest weeks that Rodimus has ever endured.

"We need to rendezvous," Megatron says lightly, but in his voice is an odd strain. "I detected your spark signature on arrival, but I can't get a precise fix."

His emotional sub-unit is blanking and bursting in turns. Megatron has come back. The first thing that Megatron has done is to look for him. Rodimus hasn't been left behind or betrayed at all, despite his impulsive conclusions, despite their last, horribly heated argument about Megatron's need to save yet another subjugated population, held up against the single-mindedness of Rodimus' battered pride to retrieve his ship and get his revenge.

He snipes out their location and revels in the sweetness of their usual bantering. There is something steady and calm rising in his chest, even when Megatron fires straight at the window holding Rodimus and the crew prisoner. He stays on board the Worldsweeper long enough to hear the surprising truth behind all the machinations that have led them here - he's still the captain and this is his duty - and then sees the vicious conclusion of the battle between Adaptus and Solomus to the end. Rodimus picks up the recall trigger and teleports himself to his ship, anticipation shuddering in every line of his armor.

When they reunite, it's easy enough to hide the tightness in his chest with their plans for defeating the Functionist Primus. But he draws a line when Megatron makes to head back for the Last Light.

"I'm not letting you out of my sight," he says, in the tone that brooks no disagreement.

"Still?" Megatron asks archly after a moment. "You still think I'm going to betray you?" They're leaning closer to each other without conscious input, Megatron's field flaring warmly and uncertainly against his.

It makes Rodimus' spark whirl in a complicated jig. "Who said anything about betrayal?" he asks, though it's more unsteady than he intended. "I just think that we're at our best when we're together."

Megatron's quiet confidence in him gives Rodimus the strength to motivate the crew as they stand over their respective hotspots clutching their Matrices. It's all over before he knows it, although the crestfallen tinge in Megatron's optics when their Matrix doesn't open for the ex-warlord twinges more than Rodimus' missing arm.

And then it only gets worse when Prowl arrives and demands that Megatron has to stand trial, this time with the Galactic Council. Rodimus would have happily protested Prowl's audials into malfunctioning if not for Megatron softly putting a hand on his arm. "Rodimus, please. He's right."

It's not right.

They take off on their victory lap, and Megatron's preternatural calm both soothes and inflames the roiling in Rodimus' processor. Megatron glances at him and murmurs, "I'm grateful for one more day. Especially a day like this."

He hears Whirl's sarcastic reply. "Er- literally nothing happened. We flew past some planets and talked."

Megatron smiles. "Yes. And I wouldn't have changed a thing."

The yearning burns.

So it's a no-brainer when Nautica, Perceptor and Brainstorm accost him and outline their risky ludicrous idea. "Think about it," Brainstorm says, unnecessarily persuasively. "We could keep going. A new quest - on our own terms. No rules. No limits."

"Chances of this actually working?" Rodimus asks, just to stop his mind from racing.

"Astronomically slim," Perceptor cuts in.

It's better than nothing. Rodimus will take a sliver of 'astronomically slim' before he gives Megatron and his ship up without a fight.

"Then it's a hell of a yes," he answers.

He doesn't look at Megatron until it's done. He doesn't look at him even when Ultra Magnus points out that the quantum engines have jumped them further than they've ever jumped before, or when he hears that the navicomp has no idea where they are. As the crew cheers raucously around them, he slips into his co-captain's chair, next to Megatron who's staring forward blindly.

"How long will it take us?" Ultra Magnus asks.

"What, to explore the entire universe?" he breezes back. "Well, if I had to guess...taking account of all known variables and allowing for every possible outcome...if I had to guess, I'd say it'll take us more or less forever."

He reaches out to Megatron with his field then, pushing reassurance and just a smidgeon of his own fierce joy. "What do you think, co-captain?"

Megatron jerks out of his stupor and looks at Rodimus. "What do I think?"

"Yeah."

Megatron's field is shaky as Rodimus lets his own slide over it. "I think forever sounds about right."

They haven't had a moment alone since Megatron came back. It seems almost presumptuous to expect that they can just pick up where they left off, especially when Megatron offhandedly mentions that the four weeks they've been apart has translated into *819 years* in the Functionist universe.

So many centuries. It wouldn't have been unusual if Megatron has taken another lover or two during that time, though Rodimus can feel his spark shrinking at the thought. How is he even going to ask, and why would Megatron have waited for him? They never made any promises to each other, never uttered anything beyond the shaky exhalations of their passionate coupling.

It rattles at him like a screw loose in his tank, and soon it becomes unbearable. Megatron has also disappeared without a word at some point during the celebration, which makes everything worse. Rodimus excuses himself to his habsuite, torn and hating it.

He tries to throw himself into recharge but his processor won't stop turning. Perhaps that deep connection he felt was completely one-sided and imagined. Rodimus knows himself better than anyone, after all - he knows his unhealthy desire to be admired in spite of all his flaws, his destructive need to be needed by others who are equally lost and imperfect.

But what he feels doesn't seem to be any of that. And the longer that Rodimus thinks about it, the surer he is.

There is something bigger than him and his petty insecurities here. He's made a connection that sets his spark ablaze, seized upon a longing that feels stronger than any other impetus he has ever known. He has to pursue it.

He *wants* Megatron, with every fiber of his being.

With a renewed sense of purpose, Rodimus flings himself off the berth and heads for the door. For the first time in their long history, they're on equal footing. All Rodimus has to do is *ask*. He's tired of guessing and running. He slams the access pad and pulls up his comm suite, preparing to send a message to see if Megatron is awake.

The door slides open, and Rodimus stops short.

Gleaming red optics look him over and soften when their gazes meet. Megatron hesitates.

And then slowly, telegraphing the movement with deliberate unhurriedness, he raises a servo. Rodimus thinks he might have forgotten how to vent - his overheating gauge is rising more rapidly than can be logically explained otherwise. In the very corner of his peripheral vision, he sees a battered Rodimus Star gripped tightly in Megatron's other servo, worn and scratched by years upon years of handling.

Megatron cups the side of his face carefully, and something about the gesture makes Rodimus' spark throb.

"Do you still want me?" Megatron murmurs.

It's so natural to lean into the touch of that warm hand, to turn his helm after a moment so that he can press a kiss bereft of bravado into the weathered palm. All of his fears fall away.

"Yes," he answers simply. "Yes."

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap! Thank you all for sticking with this slightly unconventional fic to the end ;) I'd love to hear which of the 3 earlier lifetimes were your favorite, if any.

There were also several parallels, progressions and reversals throughout the incarnations that I enjoyed writing, along with the nods to their eventual lives as Rodimus and Megatron that I hope you had fun seeing.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!